

# Western Lore



Issue  
#1

50¢



You have in your hands the very first issue of Western Lore, a collection of essays and stories involving various western topics. Yes, it is that broad.

## **Responsible People:**



Archbishop Dave "Smith" submitted an article and did endless computer stuff, Richard "Peep King" Hansen helped with photo scanning, Hans Sommer and Jeff Darras took some photos, Kristen Parker had one of her's used without permission, Ed Carroll edited the written stuff, and Tim White did the rest, so send your complaints to him.

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## Introduction



For close to eight years now my friends and I have been finding ghost towns in Nevada to camp at. When trying to avoid research for papers at my college library I would be pulled by some uncontrollable force to the Nevada history section. Here I did endless browsing and found new places in the desert to explore. My teachers always told me that my papers were okay but lacking a little research. Yea, yea. I would get enthusiastic and make pamphlets with stories, maps, descriptions, then and now photos of these towns, and give them to my friends.

The information was always wrong.

The books were usually out of date (the pile of rubble today being the intact buildings in the twenty year old photo kinda thing), the maps were hand drawn by nostalgia seeking geezers with bad memories and drinking problems, and they always, always, were going for that hokey old westy feel, AND made it seem a lot cooler than the places actually are. Somehow though, we always had a blast.

After years of my friends listening to me bitch about the books I used for reference being of such poor quality they finally told me to "go write your own damn book". Sounded like a good enough idea but I don't know the first thing about writing a book and money and time is out of the question. So I figured I would do a magazine instead.

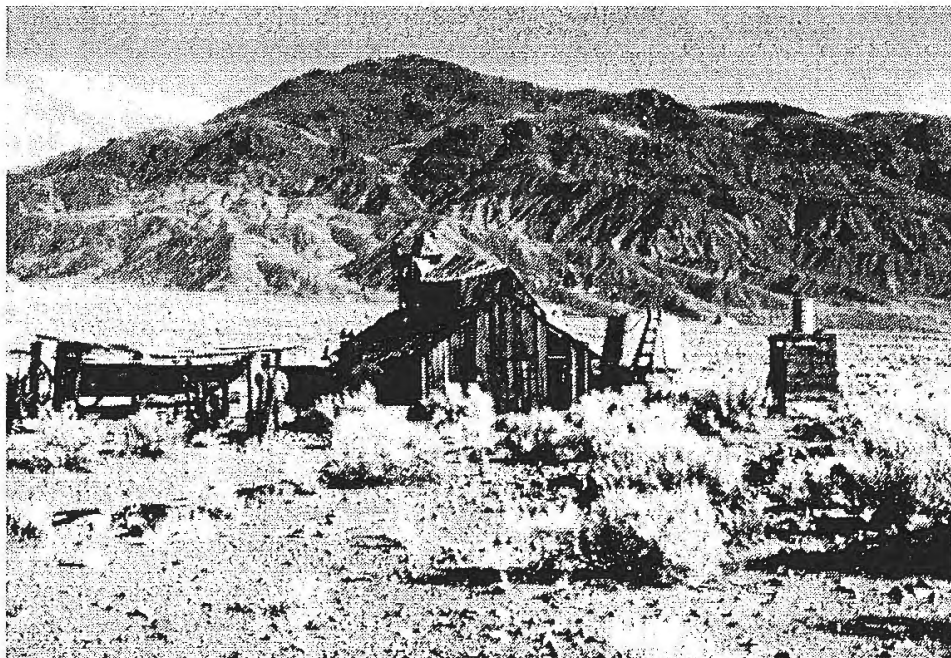


## Our First Ghost Town Trip: Marietta

I should thank Lou. It all started with him. He bought this book on ghost towns put out by Sunset Publications, the same people that bring you Sunset magazine with pretty pictures of the west and yummy recipes. This book was no less romantic than the magazine and got Lou all excited about going to one of these places. He brought the book and the idea over to Hans and I and cajoled us until we shared his enthusiasm. Didn't take much. We picked the town of Marietta for our first trip.

We told our friend Jeff and scheduled a weekend. When it came down to it, Lou couldn't make it, he had other things of more importance to do. It's kind of funny that we have now been on more than a dozen of these trips, invited Lou everytime, and he has never been. I still have his book.

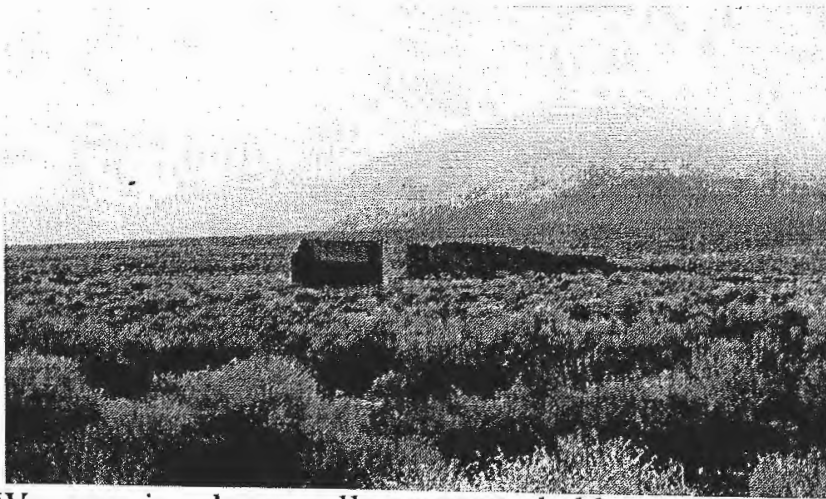
So we were going off of a couple of pictures of falling buildings and a paragraph story of the town. It's unique in that there's a marsh nearby where they extracted borax. Not as glamorous as silver but unusual enough to be interesting. The town was formed in the 1870's and housed a Wells Fargo stagecoach station that was robbed, like 37 times in a single year. Pretty neat. Our expectations were high.



Having never done this before, we thought we could get out there in about five hours as the map had us believe. We were also expecting it to be hot. It's the desert, right? After traveling some seven to eight hours, thinking that we were lost, thanks to the crap-ass map, we arrived around 1:00 a.m. We saw a few structures that seemed really great but also saw a couple of make shift houses with lights on, powered by generators. What the hell? This is supposed to be a ghost town and no one is supposed to know about it except for us! Shit. Our emotions were a mixture of enthusiasm, disappointment, fatigue, and we were freezing too! We put on every layer of clothes that we brought and were still cold. We checked stuff out, built a fire, and drank beer until about four. That helped. Hans had recently purchased a new kickbutt sleeping bag and decided to try it out the right way. He stripped down to his undies and slept cowboy style. Woke up the next morning cold, and his clothes were covered in frost.

Ha ha.

That morning was potently memorable. Beautiful. We woke up fairly



early. We were in a large valley surrounded by mountains. The moon was still out, a white dot in a deep blue sky, almost unreal. The sun hadn't yet peaked over the jagged horizon so it was still cold. As the sun did rise you could see the valley's shadow scoot across the flat brushy land. It was pretty damn alright.

When the sun came up it got warm, really warm. We decided to leave the locals alone and headed to the outer edge of the valley. We had noticed all of these trails leading up into the hills and naturally wondered where they led. We drove as far as we could up one of them until it was too much for the truck. We packed a backpack and headed up on foot. It just seemed to keep going with nothing to lead to. Up, up, up, trudge, trudge, trudge.

After about a mile or so we began to seriously wonder if it was worthwhile to continue. We had already had a nice hike and were in the mood for a new form of excitement. Jeff really thought it was a good idea to keep going and kept suggesting that we at least see what's around the next bend. He was persistent and Hans and I were getting irritated and decided that this one would be the last for sure. We turned and saw a cabin way up on the top of the hill. Hot damn!

We were so excited we began to run. Yeah! It was farther than we expected so we started walking again. It was better than we could have dreamed. Had to have been built, crudely, in the twenties. There was a mine and a stamping structure that explained its existence. Clearly nobody had been there in a long time. The trail was rough, weathered, overgrown with brush, and the cabin was undisturbed. There were magazines from the thirties, an old bed, a wine bottle, corked, still with wine in it, and the best part, old dynamite. Yeah. We had a gun with us and the resident pyro (uh, that would be Hans) thought it would be fun to go sit on top of the hill, shoot at the cabin, and try to hit the dynamite, and cause the whole thing to explode. This is the man who left his clothes outside to get frost on them. So we told him if he disturbed the cabin in anyway we'd shoot him...or something. Soon, we headed back down the hill, saddened by the fact that we weren't prepared to spend the night up there. That would've been so great. The sky at that elevation. The quiet. The eeriness of that lone cabin.

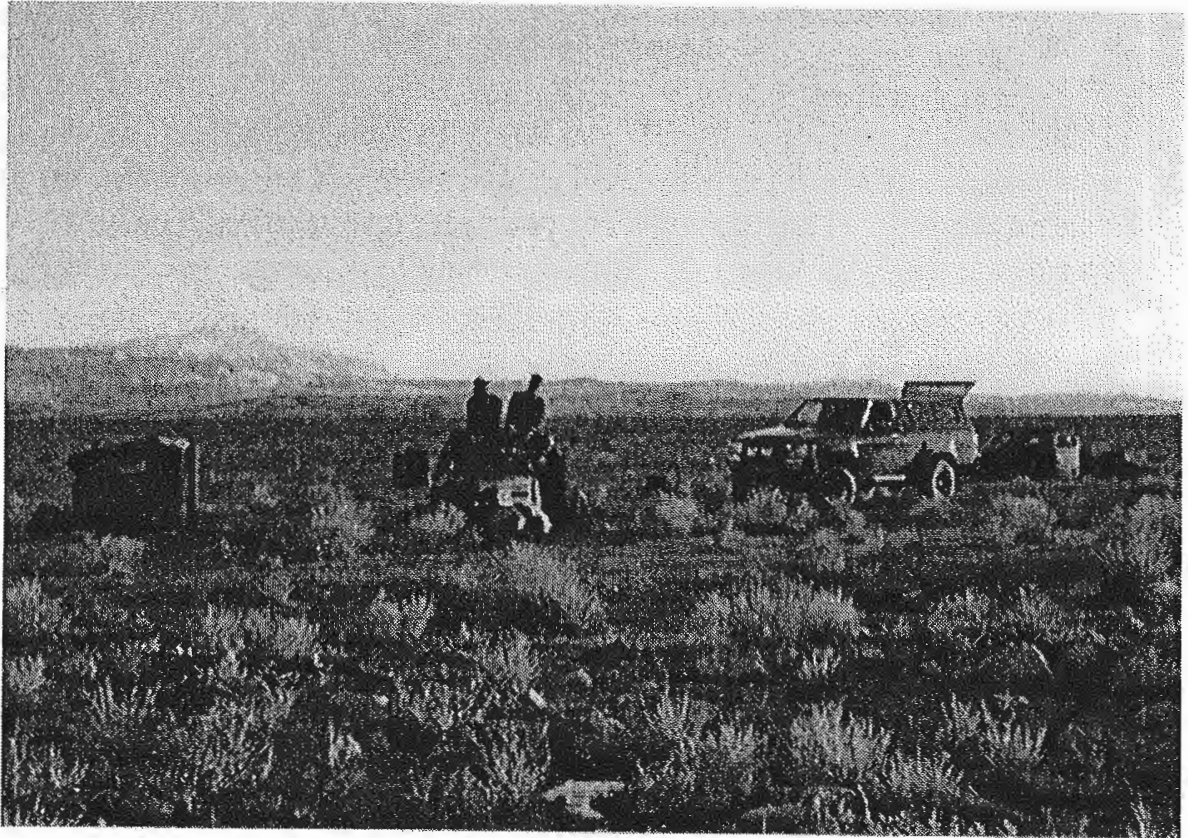
We got to the bottom, we were hungry, hot, and exhausted. We had the goods to make PBJ's. Yippee. Jeff took out the brand new jar of jelly and dropped it on a rock. I was profoundly sad. I was hungry. I knew that it was karma because I laughed at Hans when he had to put on frosty clothes. I hate karma. It was hot in the desert and I had to eat a dry peanut butter sandwich. Darn.

We drove down to the marsh to check it out, nothing special. We checked out the rest of the valley looking for a spot to spend the night. It's the desert, with tiny scrubby sagebrush and flat -- you can see everything in the valley -- as Hans demonstrated when he took a walk with the trusty roll of toilet paper. Where can you hide? He walked out quite a ways but you could still see him. Jeff and I watched him drop his draws and squat. We waved, he waved back.

Well, we did find a good spot. For some reason someone picked this random location in which to deposit three dead car shells. They were pretty cool, from the twenties and thirties, rusty and weathered clean. We finished off the day with a large, luxury model, desert campfire, fed on potatoes and veggies cooked in the fire, opened some

tasty wine, discussed the day's events, and enjoyed fresh memories that put smiles on our faces. The senses were happy. Our tired bones were perched comfortably by the fire, our tummies filled with good vittles and hooch, the view was amazing from any angle, the warm air began to get crisp and the only sounds were made by the crackling fire and our laughter.

Thanks Lou.





## Goldfield, NV

In 1903 young Billy Marsh and Harry Stimler packed up the wagon and headed south out of Tonopah because they had heard rumors of gold in the hills. They traveled for two solid days and most certainly found what they dreamed of. Staking a bunch of claims, they worked the area and were soon rewarded for their efforts. Of course everyone wanted in on the action and instead of being assholes about it they said, "come on in, the water's fine." Soon a tent camp sprang up that they named "Grandpa."

Silver is the big nugget in Nevada but this area was full of gold. Full enough to establish, in the middle of frickin nowhere, the largest city in Nevada in 1907 -- 20,000 people, five banks, three newspapers and five railroads.

Now dig this, that year the town was pulling in \$10,000 a day in gold and silver. Little Grandpa turned out to be a spring chick and grew as fast as analytic cubism (Picasso started *Les Femmes d'Alger* that year). They changed the name to Goldfield, and let me tell you, it was one badass town.

In 1906, Goldfield held the world's lightweight boxing championship. Joe Gans and Battling Nelson duked it out for a world record of 42 rounds. Bam, bam! They could've gone for another 42 but Nelson, in a fit of fury was disqualified for "a vicious foul." I wonder if he bit Gan's ear off.

Badass, and tough too. So tough that the town hired Virgil Earp, legendary lawman, as deputy in 1905. Deputy. He wasn't even tough enough to be sheriff. Claude Inman, the sheriff, was paid more money than the president of the U. S. of A. That's how badass he was.

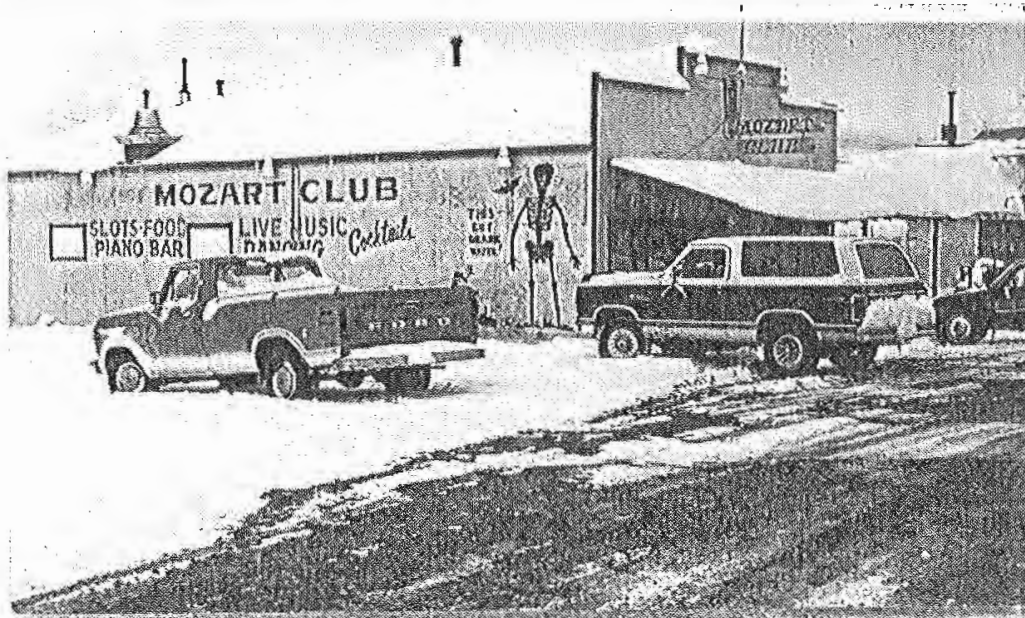
Unfortunately, Goldfield suffered the same fate as most of Nevada's cities that once thrived at the turn of the century. The two F's got em.



First was the flash flood that effected as many people as the Armory show in New York in 1913. Whhooooosshhh. Wiped out. And if that wasn't enough, the fire in 1923 sent them to the mat. The destructive force represented by fire in desert cities during this time should not be underestimated. That fire killed 54 city blocks. 54! No town can survive that. Every town in Nevada that I've studied had been severely effected by fire at some point. You would think that towns died because the mines dried up, sometimes they did, but mostly it was fire. Crazy huh? But remember that even if the mines dried up and the town was still standing, people would live there and open up a casino or two.

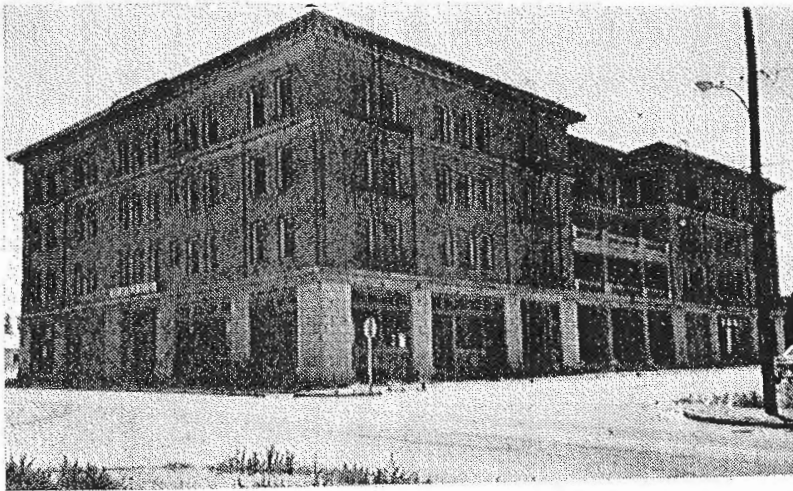
Today, Goldfield is a sleepy little bugger. They should change the name back to Grandpa, old, slow, and full of memories. It's still a good town though. Population is down to about 500 or so, lots of empty buildings, and spotted with junk cars. The editor of this publication, Ed, damn near wets himself when he catches sight of the dead Airstreams and other roundy camping trailers, he's a sucker for em.

A bunch of us drove through Goldfield a month or so back and stopped at the Mozart Club. Seemed like the only bar open, although there is a rumor that there's a bar that has been open longer than any other in Nevada somewhere in town. We wanted to go to Still Stan's because of the great home-made hooch still above the sign but they seemed long closed. The Mozart is no slouch with the signage though. They have a really nice mural of a deader than dead skeleton painted black with the words, "This guy drank water" above it. Really nice, by my art school standards. We went in. A cozy place. \$1 Budweiser drafts. "Do you have anything cheaper?" asked Dave. They all ate peanuts and drank the beer while filling out Mozart Club postcards. I went for a walk.



I walked to the junk store down the way. Lots of stuff outside, sign said "open" but nobody was home. Went across the street to the elaborate hotel that they've been trying to restore for a guzillion years. Great building. Built during the big years. 150 rooms, half with private baths, carpet and brass beds. The lobby was of remarkable craftsmanship. Lots of heavy carved wood, lined with dark mahogany walls, Ooh-la-la. But there it sits. Nobody has lifted a hammer on it in years. No one has the money to continue the project, and it would be impossible to get enough people to Goldfield to use it anyway. Sad. The scaffolding is rusting.

Walked down the back streets. So strange. All of these great old buildings, well designed, well built, character and charm out the ass, just sleeping, hauntingly vacant. No one even boards up the windows. I walked inside of one, an old store of some sort and just sat by the huge iron pot belly stove. There was a small snowdrift on the floor next to it, blown in by the cold mountain breeze. I placed my hands around the stove. It was like ice. Sadly inappropriate. But the sun was out and casting inviting, blinding rays of warmth all over the room. I was very comfortable. It was my space, making friends with that lonely building. You know how you can walk around a busy city and not notice great buildings, or when you do you feel like they belong to



Goldfield Hotel

someone else? It doesn't happen in Goldfield. You feel for that moment that the experience of strong appreciation is all yours.

I got really cold and wandered back into the bar for warmth. Aahhh, that's why everyone is in the bar and not out walking the streets. I asked the skeptical old bartender if he knew what year the Montezuma building that used to stand across the street was torn down. He said nothing, reached behind him and handed me a brochure on "historic" Esmerelda County.



# Westing by Tim and Beer

-- Archbishop Dave "Smith"

Captain Robbie Knievel was attempting the greatest jump of his life -- 30 limos -- on live teevee. Well that's what it sounded like Sunday night while drunkenly watching the Simpsons.

Bill looked over as he grabbed another beer, "Let's go." He was jumping Tuesday night, so we called up Avel and Steve and asked if they wanted to go. Of course. Bill bought a \$500 VW Fox, but it was out of commission by Monday night.

Steve and Avel showed up at 2:30 AM, and Avel stayed up all night playing Atari 2600. There was no way we were going to miss out, so we rented a Plymouth tuesday morning. By the time we left to go pick up the car, we knew we weren't going to make it on time. But that was no reason not to go. Hell, we had a Redd Foxx tape.

I needed to pick some crud up from work, so we swung by on our way out of town. I saw poor little Timmy White sitting at his desk looking sad and pathetic, "Hey Tim, we're driving to Vegas to see Robbie Knievel jump. We're not going to make it on time. Wanna go?" Tim told the Walking Boss he was sick and hopped in the car.

The first thing Tim did was demand we take the sketchy snow route over Donner Pass at I-80 and down Highway 95 to Vegas. We did whatever it took to keep Tim off our backs. That man is dangerous. We figured if it was snowed in, we could retreat and take I-5. Unlike those stupid chumps the Donners, we zipped over the pass with nary a bit cannibalism.

Bill doesn't pay much attention when he drives, but it's okay because he drives fast. We started a pool on when Bill would loose control. Avel was sitting up front, and when it was his time, he'd turn off the wipers.

No luck, Bill didn't crash. It didn't matter, we weren't going to make it anyway.

We stopped at a thrift store somewhere in the desert and bought a tape of truck driving songs, and some Atari games. They had a gnarly bitchin mirror with an airbrushed picture of a hotpants wearing, bare breasted biker babe straddling a Harley. Man, what I wouldn't do for a piece of ass like that, but Tim is the only one I know Man enough to handle that kind. That's why he's The King of Nevada.

We hit 95 which, if you don't know, runs straight down the middle of nowhere -- right down the throat of Nevada. Bill was making good time, when The Man came down hard on us. Bill patiently explained that we were in a hurry to see Robbie Knieval. The Man asked why we didn't have anything better to do than ditch out of work and drive to Vegas, also pointing out we should just watch it at home on teevee. Fuck The Man! Off the pigs! The Man just don't understand. Stop talking sense, pig. Bill took his ticket. He did not shoot the deputy.

I don't know if you've ever listened to Redd Foxx, but he ain't funny. That didn't stop us from playing his tape though. Sample punchline: "Tamale wagon? Hell, I didn't even notice his zipper was down." Somewhere, someone threw the tape out the window. We almost stopped and decided we'd just pick it up on the way back. We put in the tape with *Holiday Road*. Don't act like you don't know what I'm talking about, we both know it's that song on *National Lampoon's Vacation*.

When we hit Mina, Tim pointed out a good bar, so we stopped. We piled out of the car, and Bill left the engine running for quick getaway. Several \$1.25 cans of Meister Brau colored us gone.

Full bladders, but we desperately needed more beer. We sped past two hippies hitchhiking. We laughed at them for being stuck out in the middle of snow covered BF Egypt, then figured, what the hell and we turned around. We crammed 'em in the Plymouth, and now there was seven.

Word on the street was they were hitching to Guatemala by way of El Paso. Straight from Huggy Bear's mouth. I shit you not. We stopped at a McDonalds leaving the car running with the hitchhikers. We had spent all our money on beer, and Steve wasn't sharing. Scraping change, Bill, Avel, Tim and I had enough to split a cheeseburger four ways. I didn't even get a pickle. Bastards.

We located an ATM but there was no more time left to eat, we had to see Robbie, damn it. We passed through another town barely big enough for a bar. We stopped. Had a few beers. Even the hitchhikers had a few. We were trying to decide whether to continue on or stay and drink. The hitchhikers decided we should continue.

Time was running short so Avel wrote "Please don't pull us over. Vegas by 6!" in the dust on the Plymouth. Bill got pulled over again. Not only is The Man ignorant, but he can't read none neither. The cop said, "Do you know how fast you were going?" Bill, "35. No, okay, it was 40." Then he explained why we were in a hurry. The cop ran the



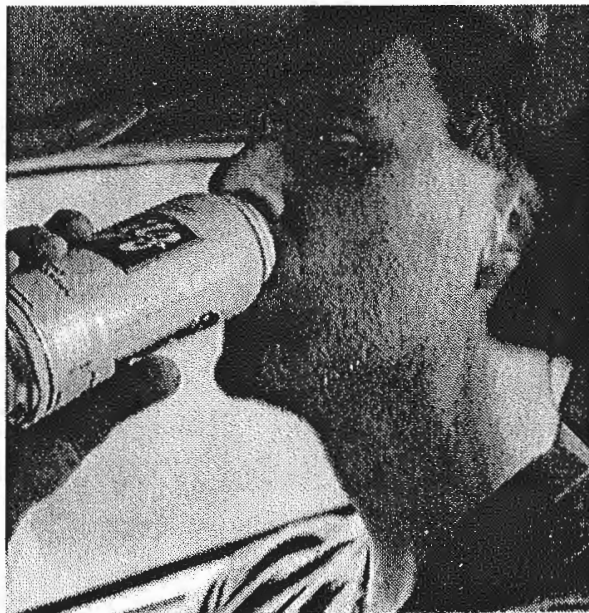
license, and let us go with a warning. Bill yelled "Yay!!" or "Woo!!" or something else dumb like that and we took off. The cop didn't even mention that the car was overloaded with people. You know why? Cause he was scared. Scared of what Tim might do to him. Scared that Tim would kick hell out him and his women and children. Scared so bad that he don't even want to go on living. Tim is the Heart of Darkness. He has that effect on people.

We rolled onto Vegas. The hitchhikers asked quietly but firmly to please be let out. We slowed down long enough to get them the hell out, picked up a dozen of Schlitz, and drove to Robbie.

He had already jumped. We weren't even close. We got a cheap steak, and some drinks. Five drinks for the four of us. "Uh, you ordered an extra drink." "No, I'm just an alcoholic." I was desperate to get drunk so I didn't have to drive on the way back. The steak sucked, the service was horrible. It was impossible to get a waiter to come by the table. It took forever to order, and another million years to get our drinks. We decided to short 'em \$20, so we tossed our money on the table and made an orderly, but quick break for the car. The waiter came running out. "Oh, we're \$20 short? Sorry about that." We gave him his 20 clams, the bastard. Hopped in the car and headed home.

We played the song *Holiday Road* over and over and over all the back. As the sun rose on the Highway 99 corridor, Tim and Avel realized that *Holiday Road's* just a metaphor for heroin addiction. Tim called in sick. I showered and went to work.

*Archbishop Dave "Smith" is an alcoholic midget with a big mouth. Just as an archbishop is one point holier than a bishop, he is also one point drunker.*





## The Mina Club

There are two things that make the central Nevada town of Mina cooler than its sister town of Luning. For one, the name. Mina. What's the town all about? That's right, mining. The laziness of the town is clearly reflected in the spelling of the name. M-I-N-A. You don't waste an extra letter by calling it "Miner", and it's phonetically correct too.

The other thing that makes this town great is it's only business, the Mina Club. It's been around for about 500 years or so and I have reason to believe that the only things that have changed is the addition of indoor plumbing and electric beer signs. Oh yeah, and I bet they didn't serve Meister Brau brand beer in those fancy ass *moderne* aluminum cans to the minas in 1875 when they would come crawling out of their holes at the end of the day.

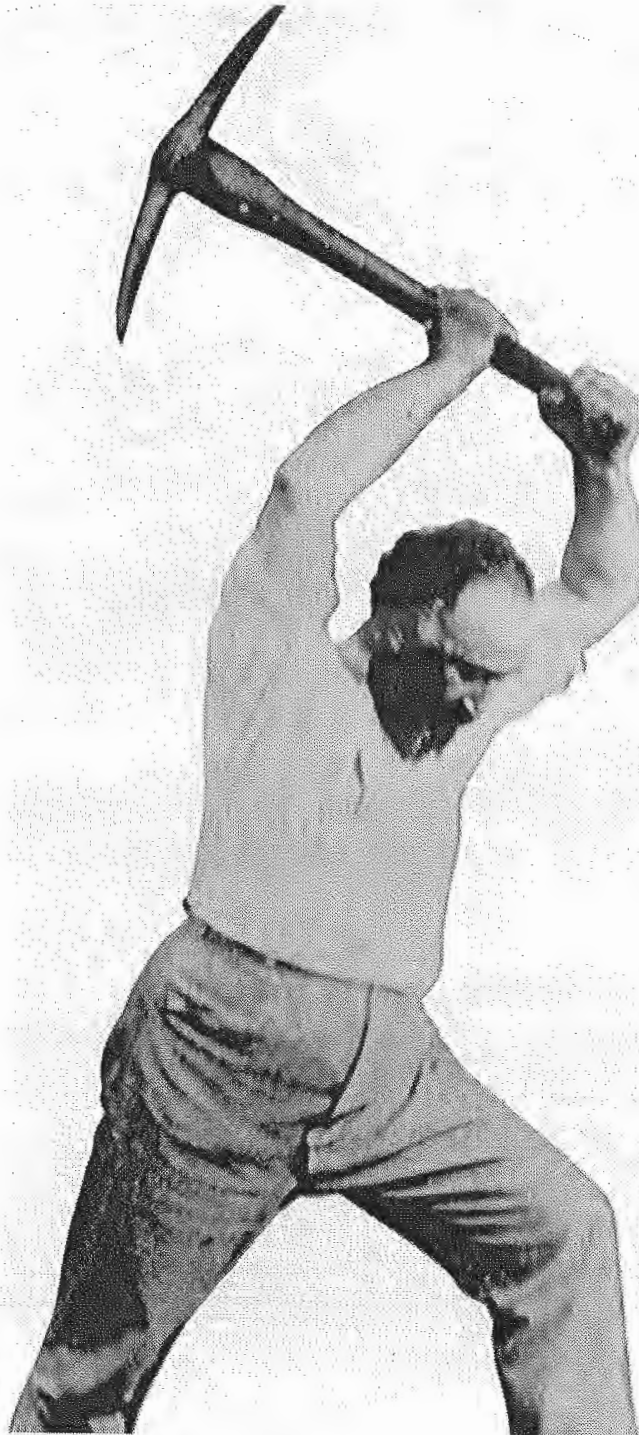
Went wandering in there a while ago one afternoon smack dab in the middle of the week. One crusty old miner and the bartender were the only ones to be seen. They had nothing to say to each other so their eyes were fixated on the TV. We came in, ordered beers and sat around a table in the center of the establishment to get the full experience. After multiple empty cans began to clutter the tabletop, the crusty old guy came over to get his newspaper out of the way. We apologized for taking his table where he had been reading. He said, "naw, don't worry bout it, I already read the dern thing through twice this mornin".

After a good soaking in of the place I figured it was time for a juke box critique. Wow. I've been in my fair share of hick bars. Some people are too lazy to put in new fangled CD's, or just never get around to updating the selections to incorporate the latest thing, like that Leonard Skinnerd guy, and not screwing up the jukebox keeps a bar in good shape. The Mina Club juke goes beyond. I could try and tell you how great it is but I'd screw it up. Let me just say that they had Hank Thompson's "Honky Tonk Angels" b/w "Six Pack To Go" on 45.



Good stuff. We loaded up on quarters and played the hits. The bartender, astonished that we had tipped her 75 cents on buck and a quarter beers, was so gracious that she turned off the television and turned the volume up on the juke box.

Although it was quiet in there that day, you could sense from the wear on the furniture and walls that the locals all come out for a bash each and every Saturday night. I once called this place on one of those nights to get directions to a ghost town (and they gave them to me!) and I could hardly hear over the whoops and hollers. People know how to live it up at the Mina Club and they believe that beer was not only meant to be drunk, but meant to be swallowed.





## **A Little Something About Nothing**

People just don't understand nothin'.

Literally.

Whenever I get all excited about the desert and want to share, people don't get it. They usually stare funny and repeat in question form, "desert?" To which I either give up or take the defensive stance. "Yes, I love to go camping in the middle of the desert."

After this I start counting to ten, gives them time to contort their face to reflect their inability to comprehend. Then they will quietly respond in a, "hate to break the news to you kid but..." sort of tone, and say, "there's nothing out there".

There's nothing out there.

I could speak at this point but I count to five instead. "What do you do?" is usually their next move. I begin to tell them that we go to ghost towns blah, blah, and this helps turn things around, they start to show a little interest. They will sometimes ask, "like Bodie?" trying to make themselves sound smart, or they inquire if they are really like they are portrayed in the old west movies. "Well, no, not exactly," I'll say.

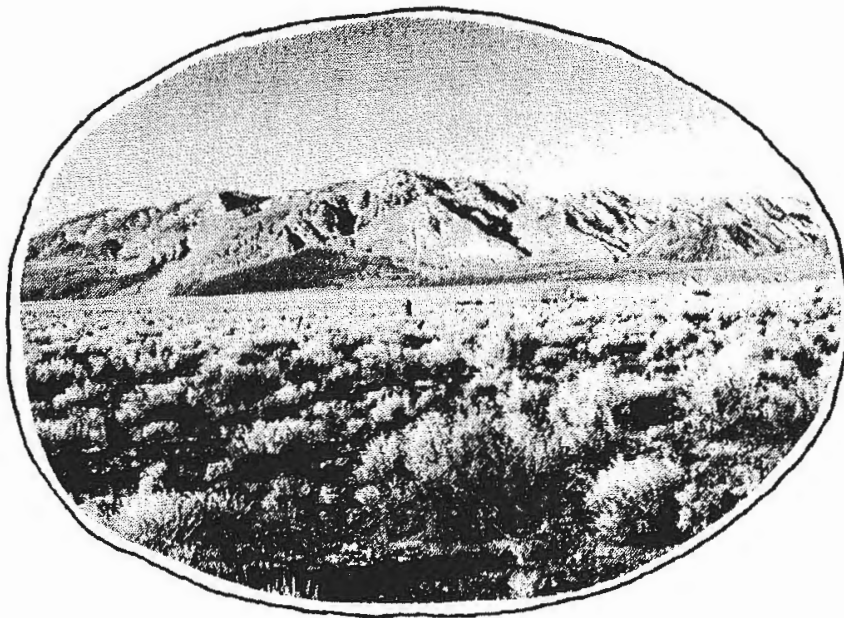
Once I start to tell them that we'll drive seven or eight hours just to light a campfire next to a crumbled foundation it becomes too much, they lose interest and excuse themselves.



After having these conversations with nice normal folks, my insecurities kick in and I start to wonder why the hell I do do it. I know that I enjoy it and it doesn't harm anyone, but what's the real thrill?

I began to analyze the scenario and it struck me as odd that when people asked what was there I would talk about the ghost towns. The truth is, ghost towns don't really exist. There are small sleepy little towns and there are piles of rubble. Ghost towns are a myth, a mental construction of our romantic western desires. They are nothing.

So, then what is it? I've been camping all over. Done the mountains in all types of weather, the beach, all that stuff, but the desert knocks me on my ass. What's the appeal? It can't be the camping aspect entirely. No shade, no little lake to fish or swim in. It's either really hot or really cold. Hhhmmmm.



To make things stranger, I love the central Nevada desert best. Not only because it's close by, but I just like it better than New Mexico or Arizona. Those deserts are technically prettier according to Hollywood and Sunset magazine because they have good colors and those large saguaro cactuses that Mexicans are always stereotyped for sleeping under. And Utah, my god! That's beautiful stuff. The mesa things and rough cut mountains, yeah. Central Nevada is drab. Little vegetation, and not very exciting. Kinda rolling mountains. Dull.

Sometimes I feel like Homer Simpson on that episode where he and a rat are being experimented on with a Skinner box type thing. The rat learns not to eat the food after being shocked three times but good ole Homer, ha, ha, he keeps, ha, ha, on trying to reach for the donut, ha, ha, getting shocked every time. God, I love the Simpsons. Why do I feel like Homer again, oh yeah, the ghost towns. I research these towns and I learn every time that the books are old and the buildings in the photos have fallen over by the time I get there. I have learned that they take pictures of one or two buildings and make it seem as though there are fourteen more just as cool, but in reality there are only those two. I have learned that people have taken everything to take from these towns. I have learned that if half way even a town at all, crusty old people live there. I have also learned that this is 1998 and the wacky old westy romancers keep trying to make them seem like 1898. I have learned but I'd drive eight hours right now to go again.

It's comforting to know that I'm not alone with my love for the desert. However, the types of people that usually dig it are not really those I want to associate myself with. Yeah sure, there are your crazy serial killers hiding out and others who live out there for god knows why, and how do they make a living anyway? Is it living? Are they just zombies? They look like it. But, I'm not talking about them -- they live there. They probably don't know if they love it or not.

But take your average science nerd geologist types. They love the desert and they'll tell ya straight up that there's a lot there. They can see past the vast landscape, jump to the ground, find the tiniest little rock, jump back up again and say, "WOW! this is a real live !#@&X!! They'll tell me its origin and how it's so obviously different than the identical looking rock I pick up (I realize, mind you, that I'm now on the opposite side of the conversation I described earlier when they say, "like Bodie?" and I get irritated at how it's nothing at all like Bodie. Same thing. But we are not really talking about my love of ghost towns here, it's my love of nothing. Okay, so go on). So what these people love about the desert IS truly there -- its *pieces*. The *parts*. But I love the whole, or conceptually, the hole.

Similarly, but not even close (see rock example above) are the mystical, spiritual Kocopelli nuts. Ugh. They drive me bonkers using that "sacred indian" guy playing horn symbol that was probably nothing more than Navajo graffiti as some sort of New Age trademark, but they do deserve some credit though. I think they see, and love, the same thing that I do, that unexplainable oomph, that overwhelming "I can feel

it but I'll sound like an idiot if I try to explain it" sensation. But here's the problem Shirley, they try to explain it. They describe it in biblical weighty kind of ways, in the Indians were right kind of ways, mother earth, natural history and all that stuff. Now don't misunderstand. In the truest sense, the bible, native cultural practices, natural history, etc. is genuine goods. I'm talkin' real power, like a 472cu Cadillac motor. Power.

But you can't just take the easy way out and describe the unknown with the unknown. What will happen? That's it Johnny -- you sound like a screwball and that's what I don't like about these people.

Some more well-meaners that make me want to punch myself in the face are those nostalgia seeking geezers. History is a construction. We all know this. People glean from stories and facts the items that interest them and fabricate their own nice, neat, stagnant version. Easy to learn and digest. Chris Columbus found this land, we killed the savages and built freeways. Easy, sure, but really wrong. The problem is with the geezers is that they really want to believe that history can be thought of as easily as this. They want comfortable simplicity. They can tell you what a ghost town was like a hundred years ago because they build their own story. They believe it, then convince you that it's the gospel. They make it seem like Rawhide Nevada only existed in 1908 when 2,000 people lived there.

It's not that easy. Rawhide was still Rawhide in 1978 when there were only five vacant buildings left and Shelly and Mike would drive out there from Fallon to pound forties and make it in Mike's rad Camaro. The geezers don't think this story is glamorous -- they're focused on that magical moment when somebody was walking around and kicked over a rock and discovered silver ore in year blah, blah. These people always describe the desert in terms of the past and the desert is effecting me now. Today.

The irritating thing is that all of these people are concerned, and think what makes the desert great is what's there, the geology, the spirit, the history. Yea, all that stuff is there, even if they are a little off kilter when describing it but it's the NOTHING of it that gets me juiced. I've realized that rocks are boring, that Kocopelli has been dead a million and three years, and that history is a hoax. Thing is, it's not about what's there but what isn't. That's the magic, that's the cream in the coffee. I'll explain.

Not too long ago we took a little trip up to Pine Grove, a great ghost town way up in the hills in a grove of pines (that's why they call it pine grove).



As usual, we left after work on a Friday night. We drove for hours and were getting pretty dang bushed when we took the turn onto the dirt road outside of Smith. We have a tradition, being safe but not always law abiding, that when we hit the dirt road at night on the way to a ghost town we'll pop open a beer. We wouldn't feel any affects until we got there and the chances of getting caught by the fuzz are nil. This night we were blasting along and were getting pretty close to our destination when we had to stop to check the topo map and argue over who's right about how to get there.

I hopped out to water a tire on the truck. I'm no expert, but I've peed a lot in my life and never heard a noise like that. I was glad to find out that it was just the tire going flat. The problem was we were out in the middle of nowhere and were drinking.

We had fix-a-flat and a bicycle pump. We pulled our best McGyver, kicked the tire, stared at it awhile, then leapt back in the truck hoping for the best. We were concerned, but barely. We drove along a ways not talking, turned on a classical music station (only option) really loud, and opened another beer. It was around midnight, dark and desolate.

I thought about my friends back home who were probably at that rock n' roll show. A bunch of people who knew each other, spreading gossip in raised voices, irritating the band because the band thinks they have something more important to say and they're going to say it louder, with a Marshall and a Les Paul. Stuffy in there, no doubt. Cigarette smoke, sweat. That's what I was thinking about. All the while knowing, from desert experience, that if we stopped the truck right then, got out and sat in silence, it would take about ten-fifteen minutes -- with a conscious effort to relax to the point that you clear your head so well that the slight ringing you hadn't realized existed goes away -- and you hear nothing, nothing. Nothing, that is except your heart beat. Dead serious. And it's comfortably present, warm, and really, really nice. Hearing nothing, starring at each other and trying hard not to start giggling because you know they are feeling it too.

It may seem hokey, I'll admit. If you've experienced it though, it isn't. Times like those I looked at the lunacy of what I was doing and tried to realize why it was thrilling to drink in a moving vehicle, to pee on a tire, to break down, to fix it, to listen to classical music loud, to try not to giggle at my friends when nobody is speaking. I don't do these things at other times. Why is it so thrilling, intoxicatingly so?

The first desert experience I ever had was in the salt flats in Utah. I was moving to California from the Midwest in a beat up '69 Cadillac convertible with two friends as stupid as I was. We had never seen the desert and we went crazy. We took the 472cu motor up to 110 mph with the top down. We just hung out there for awhile, always staring off into space and for some reason we took off all our clothes except for our hats (the sun is hot you know) and went for a walk. It was thrilling in the same way.



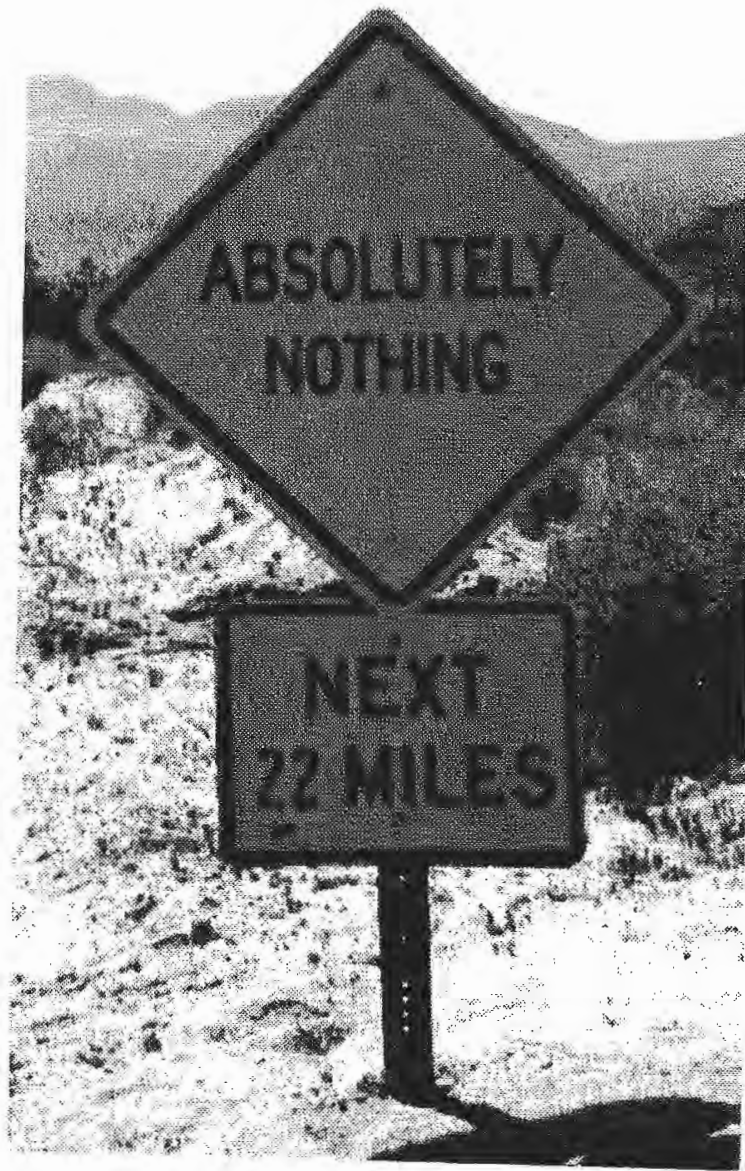
Why? Nothing.

The unknown. The void. Throws you off and you don't know what to think, or even how to feel. Like riding a bike for the first time, or kissing someone you have a crush on. The mystery. Not knowing where you are or where you're heading. We all know it. Simple but indescribable. All you can do is allude to the power, you can never get close enough to analyze it, or understand. It would spoil it anyway. But people like the science nerds, the new agers, and the old westy hobbyists get really close, then blow it.

So then what am I doing? Nothing. Only telling you that the desert has power for me and I have felt it, learned from it, not by fighting the unknown, the nothing, but relaxing and enjoying its overwhelming oomph. Absence draws attention to presence and that's why, when you are out there in silence, not talking, you think of your friends talking over stuffy rock n' roll shows, smoking cigarettes while you are breathing the freshest of air. You start to understand the dynamics of it all a lot better and can appreciate it like you never have before and it kicks ass.

Not to get all lofty and stuff, but this X that I'm describing exists everywhere, all the time. I'm using the desert as my big example here,

but really it is a part of everything we do if we make ourselves aware of it. If you sit home on your ass all the time watching the Simpsons you get less, if you constantly knock on doors to see who answers, you are living, and that's what it's all about. I have had wonderful wet kisses before but I kissed a woman on the cheek the other day who I've had a crush on for ages and my heart was POUNDING. One little peck. It will live in my fondest of memories forever, and that's why we need to do it. By exploring nothing we learn about the parts of our world, we feel our own spirit, we create our own true history, we live.





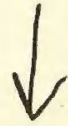
This issue is kind of an experiment. I have a lot more garbage and things to say but I'm not sure when the next issue will come out. I desperately need feedback. So I've made a make-shift postcard that you can cut out of the back page. Please write your remarks regarding any aspect of this and mail it. Thanks for reading. - TW

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